Gandhi's Philosophy of Nonviolence

Essential Selections

Compiled and Edited with Supplementary Material
by
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Gandhi Leading the Salt March, India, 1930

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Preface

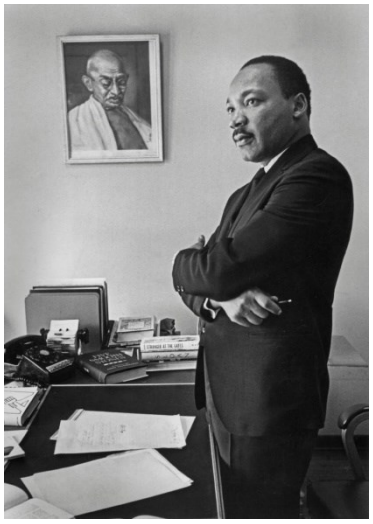
Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948)—often addressed by the respectful "**Gandhiji**," the reverential "**Mahatma**" (Sanskrit for "Great Soul"), or the affectionate "**Bapu**" (Gujarati for "father")—is widely regarded as the father of nonviolence.[1] His birthday, October 2, is commemorated as the **International Day of Nonviolence**. Of course, Gandhi was not the first to advocate nonviolence as a form of resistance to injustice. He drew on an expansive range of earlier sources, most notably the Jain religion, his own Hinduism, Christianity, the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates (469/470–399 BCE), the ancient Greek and Roman Stoics, the American transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), the Russian novelist and essayist Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), and the English writer, philosopher, and art critic John Ruskin (1819–1900).

Gandhi's significance lies in synthesizing and building on these sources, developing new methods of nonviolent resistance, advocating for and publicizing these ideas and methods in writings and speeches, and putting them into practice on a massive, coordinated scale in South Africa and India, thereby providing a template on which many future nonviolent activists would model their own campaigns. Most prominent among those he influenced was **Martin Luther King, Jr.** (1929–1968), a Baptist minister, activist, and spokesperson for the American civil rights movement. King studied philosophy, sociology, and theology as an undergraduate and in seminary, which prepared the way for his enthusiastic embrace of Gandhi's ideas upon encountering them during doctoral studies. King then absorbed Gandhi's writings, traveled to India to pay homage, and imported the Gandhian philosophy into the American context, where he adapted it to his Christianity, systematized and refined it, presented it to the public in an eloquent, powerful new voice, and wielded it in his fight for justice and against what he termed "the Triple Evils" of poverty, racism, and militarism. Although Gandhi and King are no longer with us, the Gandhi-King paradigm lives on today in nonviolent resistance movements all over the world.

Box 1 – King Explains Gandhi's Influence

"Then one Sunday afternoon I traveled to Philadelphia to hear a sermon by Dr. Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University. He was there to preach for the Fellowship House of Philadelphia. Dr. Johnson had just returned from a trip to India, and, to my great interest, he spoke of the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. His message was so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought a half-dozen books on Gandhi's life and works.

Like most people, I had heard of Gandhi, but I had never studied him seriously. As I read I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of nonviolent resistance. I was particularly moved by the Salt March to the Sea and his numerous fasts. The whole concept of '*Satyagraha*' (*Satya* is truth which equals love, and *agraha* is force: '*Satyagraha*,' therefore, means truth-force or love force) was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform. Prior to reading Gandhi, I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationship. The 'turn the other cheek' philosophy and the 'love your enemies' philosophy were only valid, I felt, when individuals were in conflict with other individuals; when racial groups and nations were in conflict a more realistic approach seemed necessary. But after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly mistaken I was.



Martin Luther King, Jr.
Atlanta, Ga., 1966
Bob Fitch photography archive, © Stanford University Libraries

Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Love, for Gandhi, was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking for so many months."

Source: "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" (Excerpt)

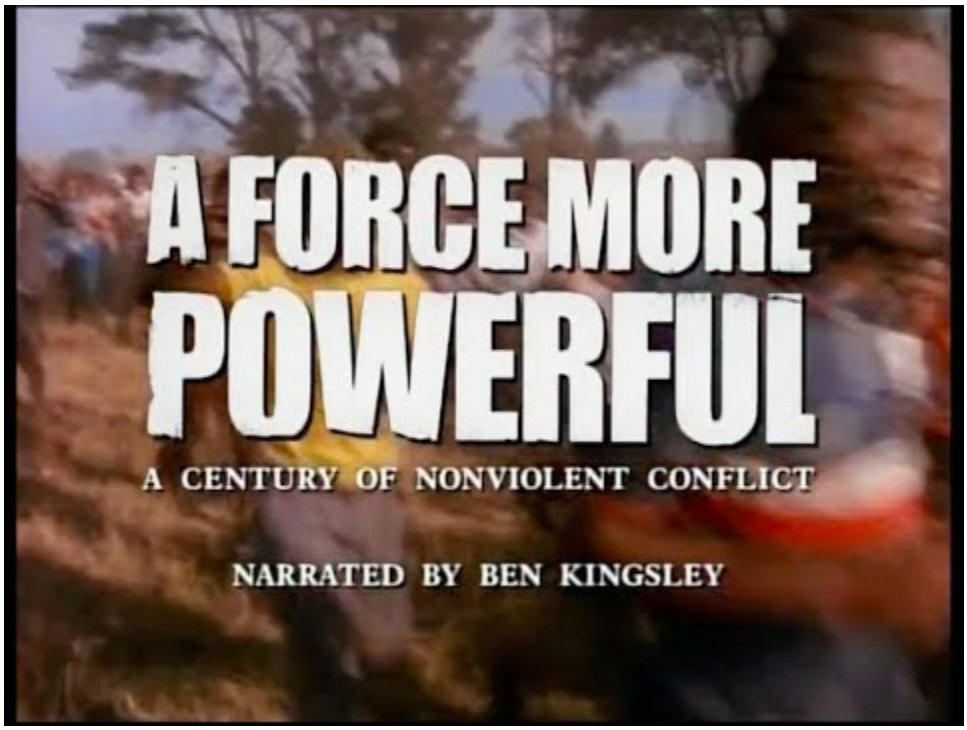
To properly evaluate today's efforts in the struggle for justice (strategically, politically, ethically, philosophically)—what we are doing right, what we are doing wrong, what we can do better going forward—requires adequate understanding. Given that we can trace much of the thinking in this area back to Gandhi, a full understanding requires careful study of his writings, speeches, and campaigns. That is the focus of this short book.

However, those seeking Gandhi's original words on nonviolence face a daunting task. He was a prolific writer and speaker. His works have been collected in 100 volumes that span over 50,000 pages! What's more, Gandhi's recurrent and ever-evolving interrelated themes—love, Truth, morality, God, nonviolence—are interspersed among numerous other topics in a variety of different contexts spanning several decades of his life. As far as I can tell, there exists no single, concise, systematic presentation of his original words isolating his philosophy of nonviolence. For this reason, I have extracted the essential selections and arranged them in an orderly fashion under headings to make their progression conspicuous.

Editor's notes: What follows are excerpts from a range of Gandhi's publications. They are unedited except for minimal formatting adjustments, including added boldface for first usage of key terms/phrases/names, omissions for the sake of brevity (indicated by ellipses), and occasional clarifications in square brackets (with longer comments relegated to endnotes). Inconsistencies in spelling, hyphenation, and capitalization across sources are left in place to maintain textual integrity. The sources are identified along the way, most

of which are freely accessible online. Supplemental boxes contain summaries of pertinent philosophical background, excerpts from Gandhi's influences, and excerpts from those he influenced. All media (images and embedded videos) reproduced in this book have a suitable Creative Commons license. Unless otherwise specified, all images are in the public domain and were retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

Pre-reading recommendation: To better grasp Gandhi's ideas, it would be immensely helpful before proceeding further to have basic familiarity with a range of concrete examples of nonviolence in practice. To this end, I highly recommend watching at minimum the India segment in Part 1 of Steve York's 1999 two-part documentary film *A Force More Powerful* (Episode 1, from the beginning to 26:19), preferably along with the Nashville segment (Episode 2, from 26:20 to 51:15). Part I continues with an episode on South Africa (Episode 3), and Part II includes another three episodes: Denmark, Poland, and Chile. Richard Attenborough's 1982 film ***Gandhi***, despite the relatively minor factual discrepancies typical of dramatizations, is also very helpful for grasping Gandhian nonviolence.



A Force More Powerful, Part I: India / Nashville / South Africa

Section I. Gandhi's Concept of Nonviolence: *Satyagraha*

[Source: *The Voice of Truth*, pp. 147–9]

For the past thirty years I have been preaching and practising ***Satyagraha***. The principles of *Satyagraha* as I know it today, constitute a gradual evolution.

Satyagraha differs from **Passive Resistance** as the North Pole from the South. The latter has been conceived as a weapon of the weak and does not exclude the use of physical force or violence for the purpose of gaining one's end, whereas the former has been conceived as a weapon of the strongest and excludes the use of violence in any shape or form.

The term *Satyagraha* was coined by me in South Africa to express the force that the Indian there used for full eight years and it was coined in order to distinguish it from the movement then going on in the United Kingdom and South Africa under the name of Passive Resistance.[2]

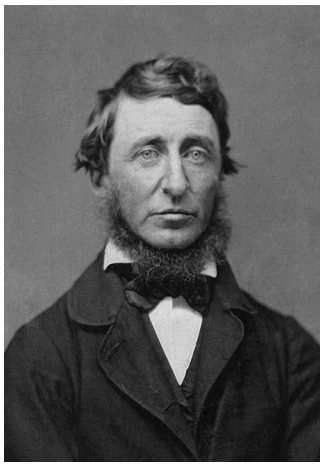
Its root meaning is holding on to truth, hence Truth-force. I have also called it Love-force or Soul-force. In the application of *Satyagraha* I discovered in the earliest stages that pursuit of truth did not admit of violence being inflicted on one's opponent but he must be weaned from error by patience and sympathy. For what appears to be truth to the one may appear to be error to the other. And patience means self-suffering. So the doctrine came to mean vindication of Truth not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but on one's self.

But on the political field the struggle on behalf of the people mostly consists in opposing error in the shape of unjust laws. When you have failed to bring the error home to the lawgiver by way of petitions and the like, the only remedy open to you, if you do not wish to submit to error, is to compel him by physical force to yield to you or by suffering in your own person by inviting the penalty for the breach of the law. Hence *Satyagraha* largely appears to the public as **Civil Disobedience** or **Civil Resistance**. It is civil in the sense that it is not criminal.

The lawbreaker breaks the law surreptitiously and tries to avoid the penalty, not so the civil resister. He ever obeys the laws of the State to which he belongs, not out of fear of the sanctions but because he considers them to be good for the welfare of society. But there come occasions, generally, rare, when he considers certain laws to be so unjust as to render obedience to them a dishonor. He then openly and civilly breaks them and quietly suffers the penalty for their breach. And in order to register his protest against the action of the lawgivers, it is open to him to withdraw his co-operation from the State by disobeying such other laws whose breach does not involve moral turpitude.

In my opinion, the beauty and efficacy of *Satyagraha* are so great and the doctrine so simple that it can be preached even to children. It was preached by me to thousands of men, women and children commonly called indentured Indians with excellent results.

Box 2 – Thoreau on Civil Disobedience



Henry David Thoreau, 1856

One early source for Gandhi's ideas about breaking unjust laws was the American naturalist and transcendentalist **Henry David Thoreau** (1817–1862), who coined the term "civil disobedience" in his 1849 essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience"—a defense of the act for which he was arrested: refusal to pay taxes as a protest against slavery. In this essay, Thoreau insists:

> If it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn. As for adopting the ways which the State has provided for remedying the evil, I know not of such ways. They take too much time, and a man's life will be gone.

He continues by articulating the potential power of his method:

> I know this well, that if one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men whom I could name—if ten *honest* men only—ay, if *one* HONEST man, in this State of Massachusetts, *ceasing to hold slaves*, were actually to withdraw from this copartnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefore, it would be the abolition of slavery in America. For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever.

Section II. The Goal of *Satyagraha*: Truth

[Source: *From Yeravda Mandir*, pp. 6–7]

The word ***Satya*** (**Truth**) is derived from ***Sat***, which means "being." Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why *Sat* or Truth is perhaps the most important name of **God**.[3] In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say that God is Truth. . . .

Devotion to this Truth is the sole justification for our existence. All our activities should be centered in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life. When once this stage in the pilgrim's progress[4] is reached, all other rules of correct living will come without effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But without Truth it is impossible to observe any principles or rules in life.

Generally speaking, observation of the **law of Truth**[5] is understood merely to mean that we must speak the truth. But we in the Ashram should understand the word *Satya* or Truth in a much wider sense. There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action. To the man who has realized this Truth in its fullness, nothing else remains to be known, because all knowledge is necessarily included in it. What is not included in it is not Truth, and so not true knowledge; and there can be no inward peace without true knowledge. If we once learn how to apply this never-failing test of Truth, we will at once be able to find out what is worth doing, what is worth seeing, what is worth reading. . . .

[W]hat may appear as truth[6] to one person will often appear as untruth to another person. But that need not worry the seeker. Where there is honest effort, it will be realized that what appear to be different truths are like the countless and apparently different leaves of the same tree. Does not God Himself appear to different individuals in different aspects? Yet we know that He is one. But Truth is the right designation

of God. Hence there is nothing wrong in every man following Truth according to his lights. Indeed it is his duty to do so. Then if there is a mistake on the part of any one so following Truth, it will be automatically set right. For the quest of Truth involves ***tapas***—self-suffering, sometimes even unto death. There can be no place in it for even a trace of self-interest. In such selfless search for Truth nobody can lose his bearings for long. Directly he takes to the wrong path he stumbles, and is thus redirected to the right path. Therefore the pursuit of Truth is true *bhakti* (devotion). It is the path that leads to God. There is no place in it for cowardice, no place for defeat.

Box 3 – Philosopher Barry Gan Illustrates the Role of Truth in *Satyagraha*

"His term for the pursuit of Truth is *satyagraha.* Literally, *satyagraha* means *holding onto truth. Satya* means *Truth*, and *graha* means *grasping*. Here is an illustrative story. Early on in the 1982 film *Gandhi* is a scene that shows Gandhi being unceremoniously thrown from a train in Maritzburg, South Africa. Gandhi had refused to move from his first-class seat, for which he had purchased a ticket, and as an Indian in 1890s South Africa, he was not allowed to sit there. Gandhi later described this event as the turning point in his life, when he ceased being a shy and ineffectual attorney and turned his attention to bringing himself and others closer to Truth.

But what the 1982 film doesn't show is what happened the following day. Gandhi had to take a stagecoach to continue his journey. The person in charge of the stagecoach, called the leader, refused to seat Gandhi inside the coach with the other, white passengers. As Gandhi puts it, he pocketed the insult and sat up top with the driver. But when the coach stopped for the afternoon, the leader wanted to smoke. So he left the coach to sit next to the driver and asked Gandhi to sit at his feet, on the rail. Gandhi at this point refused, and the leader began to beat him. But Gandhi clung to the rail and refused to be budged even as the leader attempted to pull him from his seat. Eventually the passengers themselves intervened and insisted that Gandhi be allowed to ride in the coach.

Now this is the image of Gandhi I would like you all to remember: Gandhi clinging to the rail of the stagecoach, being pulled and beaten as he refuses to loosen his grip. Here is the man who believes he is grasping Truth and refusing to let go of it. But he does not harm others for the sake of his Truth. In fact, in refusing to cooperate, he endures harm himself. His commitment to Truth requires that he, not others, suffer for it. That is his duty. . . .

Gandhi agreed with Jesus's dictum, 'Physician, heal thyself.' A story is told about Gandhi. It may be true; it may not be true, but it illustrates well his approach to life. A woman and her son once walked for a day to see Gandhi. When he met with them, the woman asked Gandhi to tell her son how bad it was for him to keep eating sweets. She said that the son would listen to Gandhi, but not to her. Gandhi asked them to return in two weeks. So they spent another day walking home, and in two weeks they spent still another day returning. When they met with Gandhi, Gandhi told the son how bad it was for him to keep eating sweets. The mother exclaimed, 'Why couldn't you tell him this two weeks ago?!' Gandhi answered, 'I had first to stop eating sweets myself.'

So Gandhi in his day told his fellow Indians that if they wished to cease being subjects of the British, they must first cease their own subjection of the Dalits, the Untouchables. Similarly, he argued that if Indians desired *genuine* independence, then they must not merely trade British imperialists and industrialists for Indian imperialists and industrialists."

Source: "Seeds of Duty: Holding to Nonviolence in Being and Truth" (Excerpt)
Keynote Address delivered October 2, 2016
United Nations Celebration of the U.N. International Day of Nonviolence
Printed in the Fall/Winter 2016–2017 issue of *The Acorn* 16 (1–2), pp. 37–40.

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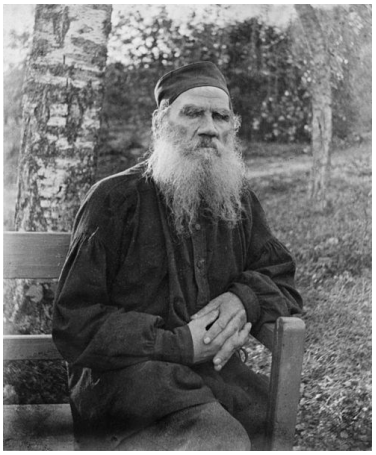
Section III. The Means of *Satyagraha*: *Ahimsa*

[Source: *The Voice of Truth*, pp. 126–7]

Ahimsa[7] [non-harming or nonviolence] is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer. But it does not mean helping the evil-doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence. On the contrary, love—the active state of *ahimsa*—requires you to resist the wrong-doer by dissociating yourself from him, even though it may offend him or injure him physically. Thus if my son lives a life of shame, I may not help him to do so by continuing to support him; on the contrary, my love for him requires me to withdraw all support from him although it may mean even his death. And the same love imposes on me the obligation of welcoming him to my bosom when he repents. But I may not by physical force compel my son to become good. That, in my opinion, is the moral of the story of the Prodigal Son [a Biblical parable in Luke 15:11–32].

Box 4 – Tolstoy & the "Sermon on the Mount"



Leo Tolstoy, 1897

Gandhi maintained a letter correspondence with the Russian novelist and essayist **Leo Tolstoy** (1828–1910). Tolstoy expressed admiration for Gandhi's reform efforts, which he saw as proof of the practicality of his (Tolstoy's) ideas about nonviolence. While Gandhi disavowed Tolstoy's anarchism, Gandhi was heavily influenced by Tolstoy's theory of "nonresistance to evil."

This theory was based on Christian ethics, especially Jesus's example of self-sacrifice for the good of others (suffering and death on the cross) and his message in the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5–7). In this Sermon, we find the Biblical version of

> The **Golden Rule**: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12)

Along with an injunction against judging others:

> Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. (Matthew 7:1–5)

And a series of sayings in favor of loving and helping enemies rather than retaliating against them:

> You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:38–48)

Gandhi, however, gradually came to recognize that the term "nonresistance," and related terms such as "passive resistance," misleadingly suggest inaction or passivity. To avoid misinterpretation, he therefore eventually came to prefer more positive, active terms, such as "nonviolent resistance," "direct action"—or "*Satyagraha*."

Section IV. How to View an Opponent

[Source: *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, pp. 193–4]

Even whilst you are suffering you may have no bitterness—no trace of it—against your opponents. And I tell you it is not a mechanical act at all. On the contrary I want you to feel like loving your opponents, and the way to do it is to give them the same credit for honesty of purpose which you would claim for yourself. I know that it is a difficult task. . . . consider their condition of mind from their

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point of view. . . . begin to think of things as our opponents think of them. . . . Three-fourths of the miseries and misunderstandings in the world will disappear, if we step into the shoes of our adversaries and understand their standpoint. We will then agree with our adversaries or think of them charitably. In our case there is no question of our agreeing with them quickly as our ideals are radically different. But we may be charitable to them and believe that they actually mean what they say. They do not want to open the roads to the "unapproachables."[8] Now whether it is their self-interest or ignorance that tells them to say so, we really believe it is wrong of them to say so. Our business, therefore is to show them that they are in the wrong and we should do so by *our* suffering.

Box 5 – Philosopher Robert Holmes on Understanding Evil

Why seek the perspective of opponents who seem blatantly "evil"? How could good people possibly entertain an "evil" perspective?

Step 1: Remember that for both Gandhi and Tolstoy, all misdeeds are forms of error—deviations from or distortions of the Truth, whether minor or grave. As philosopher Robert Holmes's explains in his analysis of evil,

> …. most of the unnecessary suffering, death and destruction in the world is a manifestation of descriptive evil, not basic moral evil. It consists of the acts of basically good people operating with various admixtures of false beliefs, misperceptions, biases, bad judgments and outright ignorance. They are governed for the most part not by malice but by fear. By fear, I include insecurity, apprehension, anxiety, worry, suspicion and a host of related notions, at one end, through outright terror at the other extreme…. Fear can lead people to do terrible things. But it is a different motive from malice. Fear is always of loss of some sort, whether personal, social, or political. It is self-referential…. Malice is a desire to cause suffering for its own sake. It is other directed. (2010, 12)

For these reasons, "Moral evil is essentially inward and subjective, as Augustine saw" (11).

Step 2: Notice the consequence of this "inward and subjective" nature of evil: "even where it [moral evil] exists, it is almost certainly difficult to identify with any confidence because it requires knowledge of motivation of a sort we rarely have" (11). This fits with Gandhi's recognition of the limits of our access to absolute Truth, and with Tolstoy's conviction, rooted in Jesus's "Sermon on the Mount," that mere human beings are in no position to serve as judge of others.

Step 3: Now tie our epistemic limitations to the moral conclusion: "Both [Gandhi and Tolstoy] were making an epistemological point, that we lack the requisite knowledge to be justified in resorting to violence" (5).

Gandhi would add that, while these points preclude judging the doer, they do not preclude judging the deed:

> Man and his deed are two distinct things. Whereas a good deed should call forth approbation and a wicked deed disapprobation, the doer of the deed, whether good or wicked, always deserves respect or pity as the case may be. 'Hate the sin and not the sinner' is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practised, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world…. It is quite proper to resist and attack a system, but to resist and attack its author is tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. For we are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of one and the same Creator…. (1968, 309–10)

Of course, you might misjudge the deed. The error may be yours, in which case Gandhi's insistence on self-suffering ensures that you will bear the burden of your own mistake, which potentially serves to correct course and strengthen character (see Section II). If, on the other hand, the error belongs to another, then, as we are about to see, Gandhi maintains that your self-suffering is the most effective method to "wean them from error" (to recall Gandhi's words from Section I).

Section V. The Key to Changing Hearts: The Law of Suffering

[Source: *All Men Are Brothers*, p. 91]

The conviction has been growing upon me, that things of fundamental importance to the people are not secured by reason alone but have to be purchased with their suffering. Suffering is the law of human beings; war is the law of the jungle. But suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears, which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason. Nobody has probably drawn up more petitions or espoused more forlorn causes than I and I have come to this fundamental conclusion that if you want something really important to be done you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also. The appeal of reason is more to the head but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man. Suffering is the badge of the human race, not the sword.

Box 6 – Morally Weighted Choice & Jiu-Jitsu

James Lawson, 2005
Photo by Joon Powell
via Wikimedia Commons.
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The law of suffering operates in conjunction with what I call the "**principle of morally weighted choice**." In his interview for the Nashville segment of York's 1999 documentary film *A Force More Powerful*, the American minister, professor, nonviolence tactician, and civil rights leader **James Lawson** explained that, for those employing the method of violence, the proffered choice is this: Do as I wish, or "I will make you suffer until you cry 'uncle.'" But, as Barry Gan explains in his book *Violence and Nonviolence: An Introduction*, those employing the method of nonviolence offer an alternative choice: "Do as I wish, or make me suffer" (2013, 87). After examining three examples of successful nonviolent action, Gan observes a shared feature in how this choice is constructed:

> …. what the activists desired to achieve was something relatively small …. But the alternatives …. were far more harsh in the eyes of most people standing on the sidelines. And the choice about which to allow was up to the authorities, the adversaries of the nonviolent activists. So in the end, either the nonviolent activists get their way, or the authorities and others perceive the response as an extreme measure to put a halt to behaviors that, on the face of it, are relatively innocuous, though their long-term ramifications are more serious. (2013, 89)

Presenting such a choice creates a perception in your favor. Your adversaries might see the wisdom of conceding right away. If they choose to make you suffer instead, your courageous and unflinching endurance may re-humanize you in their eyes and provoke **cognitive dissonance**, the potential resolution of which is a shift in perspective—a phenomenon termed "**moral jiu-jitsu**" by the American social philosopher and reformer **Richard Gregg** (1885–1974) in his *The Power of Nonviolence*, the first book-length effort to systematize Gandhi's philosophy (1935, chapter 2).

Gene Sharp, 2012
Photo by Kristna Fredsrörelsen via Flickr
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Whether or not this moral shift occurs, an extreme response on the part of your adversaries will garner sympathy for you from the sidelines and create greater opposition for them—a common backlash effect termed "**political jiu-jitsu**" by the renowned American nonviolence tactician and Gandhi scholar **Gene Sharp** (1928–2018) in his three-volume strategic study *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973, Part III, chapter 12). It's a win-win situation for the nonviolent side. However small, take the win, proceed to another step, and continue piecemeal until reaching the cumulative effect of a full victory.

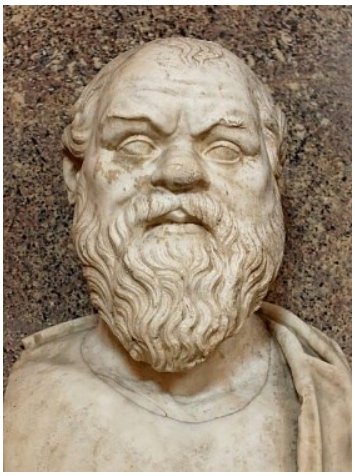
Section VI. The Source of True Strength: An Indomitable Will

[Source: *All Men Are Brothers*, pp. 104–5]

> In this age of the rule of brute force, it is almost impossible for anyone to believe that anyone else could possibly reject the law of the final supremacy of brute force. . . . Such being the hold that the **doctrine of the sword** has on the majority of mankind. . . . But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to

violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment. . . . Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will. . . . Non-violence is the **law of our species** as violence is the **law of the brute**. The spirit lies dormant in the brute, and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law, to the strength of the spirit.

Box 7 – Greek Philosophical Influence on Gandhi



Bust of Socrates

Refusal to compromise one's character or cooperate with evil, combined with an endless capacity to courageously endure any amount of suffering inflicted by an enemy, yields an unconquerable spirit. This is why Gandhi quipped in 1926 that

> "No power on Earth can make a person do a thing against his will."

When such an attitude is put into practice, it tends to have a powerful, transformative effect on others.

As philosopher Richard Sorabji explains in his article "Gandhi the Philosopher," this perspective is strikingly similar to that of the ancient Greek and Roman **Stoics**, whom Gandhi had read about and characterized as inspiring—but only well after his ideas had already taken shape. However, argues Sorabji, Gandhi was directly influence by the Stoics' role model, **Socrates** (469/470–399 BCE), as depicted in the writings of his student, Plato. In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates is on trial for allegedly corrupting the Athenian youth by practicing philosophy (alongside charges of religious unorthodoxy). In his defense, Socrates refuses to give up his quest for Truth even to save his life, fearlessly accepts the death penalty, and does so without anger or hatred against those who unjustly condemn him.

Gandhi had read Plato while under arrest in South Africa, described Socrates as a "soldier for truth," and in 1908 composed a rendition of the *Apology* in Gujarati, his native tongue. The affinities speak for themselves:

> "The unexamined life is not worth living." Socrates, Plato's *Apology* (38a)

> "A good man cannot be harmed." Socrates, Plato's *Apology* (41d)

> "I say that the admirable and good person, man or woman, is happy, but that the one who's unjust and wicked is miserable." Socrates, Plato's *Gorgias* (470e)

> "I would choose suffering over doing what's unjust." Socrates, Plato's *Gorgias* (469c)

> "Doing what's unjust is worse than suffering it." Socrates, Plato's *Gorgias* (473a)

> "No one does what's unjust because he wants to." Socrates, Plato's *Gorgias* (509e)

> "It's for the sake of what's good that those who do all these things do them…. if a person who's a tyrant or an orator puts somebody to death or exiles him or confiscates his property because he supposes that doing so is better for himself when actually it's worse, this person, I take it, is doing what he sees fit." Socrates, Plato's *Gorgias* (468b–d)

> "Then we ought not to retaliate or render evil for evil to anyone, whatever evil we may have suffered from him." Socrates, Plato's *Crito* (49c)

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Section VII. Coordinated Effort: Establishing a Nonviolent Army

[Source: *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 86]

The Congress should be able to put forth a non-violent army of volunteers numbering not a few thousands but lakhs [1 lakh = 100,000] who would be equal to every occasion where the police and the military are required. Thus, instead of one brave Pashupatinath Gupta who died in the attempt to secure peace, we should be able to produce hundreds. And a non-violent army acts unlike armed men, as well in times of peace as of disturbances. They would be constantly engaged in constructive activities that make riots impossible. Theirs will be the duty of seeking occasions for bringing warring communities together, carrying on peace propaganda, engaging in activities that would bring and keep them in touch with every single person, male and female, adult and child, in their parish or division. Such an army should be ready to cope with any emergency, and in order to still the frenzy of mobs should risk their lives in numbers sufficient for the purpose. A few hundred, may be a few thousand, such spotless deaths will once for all put an end to the riots. Surely a few hundred young men and women giving themselves deliberately to mob fury will be any day a cheap and braver method of dealing with such madness than the display and use of the police and the military.

Section VIII. An Objection & A Reply: The Relationship between Means & Ends

Box 8 – Gandhi Receives An Objection from a Reader

Anonymous reader: "Why should we not obtain our goal [i.e., **end**], which is good, by any **means** whatsoever, even by using violence? Shall I think of the means when I have to deal with a thief in the house? My duty is to drive him out anyhow. You seem to admit that we have received nothing, and that we shall receive nothing by petitioning. Why then may we not do so by using brute force? And to retain what we may receive we shall keep up the fear by using the same force to the extent that it may be **necessary**."

Source: *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, pp. 9–10

[Source: *All Men Are Brothers*, pp. 81–107]

Means and end are convertible terms in my philosophy of life.

They say "means are after all means." I would say "means are after all everything." As the means so the end. There is no wall of separation between means and end. Indeed the Creator has given us control (and that too very limited) over means, none over the end. Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception.

Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which the reverse? Nevertheless, *ahimsa* is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so *ahimsa* is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. When once we have grasped this point final victory is beyond question. Whatever difficulties we encounter, whatever apparent reverses we sustain, we may not give up the quest for Truth which alone is, being God Himself.

I do not believe in short-violent-cuts to success. . . . However much I may sympathize with and admire worthy motives, I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods even to serve the noblest of causes. There is, therefore, really no meeting-ground between the school of violence and myself. But my creed of non-violence not only does not preclude me but compels me even to associate with anarchists and all those who believe in violence. But that association is always with the sole object of weaning them from what appears to me their error. For experience convinces me that permanent good can never be the outcome of untruth and violence. Even if my belief is a fond delusion, it will be admitted that it is a fascinating delusion.

Your belief that there is no connexion between the means and the end is a great mistake. Through that mistake even men who have been considered religious have committed grievous crimes. Your reasoning is the same as saying that we can get a rose through planting a noxious weed. If I want to cross the ocean, I can do so only by means of a vessel; if I were to use a cart for that purpose, both the cart and I would soon find the bottom. "As is the God, so is the votary" is a maxim worth considering. Its meaning has been distorted and men have gone astray. The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connexion between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. I am not likely to obtain the result flowing from the worship of God by laying myself prostrate before Satan. If, therefore, anyone were to say: "I want to worship God; it does not matter that I do so by means of Satan," it would be set down as ignorant folly. We reap exactly as we sow[9]. . . .

Box 9 – Reaping as We Sow: Gandhi's Watch Example

"If I want to deprive you of your watch, I shall certainly have to fight for it; if I want to buy your watch, I shall have to pay for it; and if I want a gift, I shall have to plead for it; and, according to the means I employ, the watch is stolen property, my own property, or a donation. Thus we see three different results from three different means. Will you still say that means do not matter?"

Source: *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, p. 11

The spiritual weapon of self-purification, intangible as it seems, is the most potent means of revolutionizing one's environment and loosening external shackles. It works subtly and invisibly; it is an intense process though it might often seem a weary and long-drawn process, it is the straightest way to liberation, the surest and quickest and no effort can be too great for it. What it requires is faith—an unshakable mountain-like faith that flinches from nothing.

I am more concerned in preventing the brutalization of human nature than in the prevention of the sufferings of my own people. I know that people who voluntarily undergo a course of suffering raise themselves and the whole of humanity; but I also know that people who become brutalized in their desperate efforts to get victory over their opponents or to exploit weaker nations or weaker men, not only drag down themselves but mankind also. And it cannot be a matter of pleasure to me or anyone else to see human nature dragged to the mire. If we are all sons of the same God and partake of the same divine essence, we must partake of the sin of every person whether he belongs to us or to another race. You can understand how repugnant it must be to invoke the beast in any human being, how much more so in Englishmen, among whom I count numerous friends.

The method of passive resistance is the clearest and safest, because, if the cause is not true, it is the resisters, and they alone, who suffer.

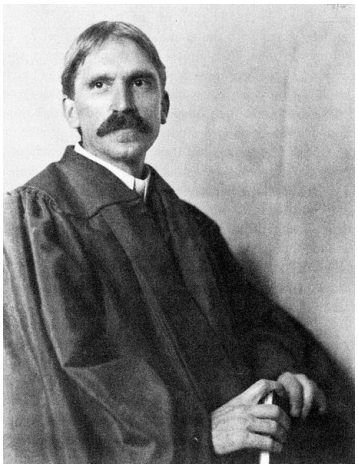
Box 10 – Means & Ends: The Wider Debate

The debate over means and ends is rich and complex but has enormous ramifications for practical rationality and morality. Gandhi took his starting point from his favorite book, the ***Bhagavad Gita***, a Hindu sacred text on which Gandhi produced a book-length commentary (Desai 1946). Here's a representative passage from the *Gita*:

> "Be intent on action, not on the fruits of action; avoid attraction to the fruits and attachment to inaction! Perform actions, firm in discipline, relinquishing attachment; be impartial to failure and success—this equanimity is called discipline." (2.47–58)

One also encounters deemphasis on the attainment of ends in Stoic, Buddhist, and Daoist thought. Stoics, for example, give the example of a skilled archer who misses the target due to an unforeseeable gust of wind. On the Stoic view, the miss does not reflect on the archer because the wind isn't in her control. But supposing she still performs well (adequate focus, aim, release, and other manifestations of her skill), which *is* in her control, that's what really matters and is the only thing she should be concerned with. So, the thought is that frustrations can be avoided and happiness obtained to the extent that we redirect our expectations and desires away from achieving ends and towards acting well and having a virtuous character. The Stoic, Buddhist, Daoist, and Hindu traditions developed methods, such as meditation and yoga, aimed at training oneself to accomplish this redirection.

John Dewey (1859–1952), the American pragmatist philosopher, developed an intricate philosophy of means and ends as inextricably bound up with one another. First, ends are themselves means in the sense that once obtained, they typically become starting points for a further end. More important, Dewey noted that one needs an "end in view" in order to choose a means in the first place. In this sense, the end is already in the means. Yet the means also affects the end in two ways: (a) while undertaking a means, one gains new information that often alters the end being pursued; (b) the value of the end depends on the costs and benefits of the means required to bring it about. The end is not an isolated point cut off from the means; rather, the end is an accumulation of the process leading up to it. Take a sports match for example. If one could simply skip the game and go straight to being declared victor, it would be pointless. What is desired isn't just any victory, but a *deserved* victory, and whether it is deserved depends on the means by which the match is played. This is why playing well is intrinsically valuable in spite of a loss, unlike an undeserved win. In attributing some value to victory but with emphasis on the means, Dewey seems to be in partial agreement with the Stoics and the *Gita*, and consistent with Gandhi.



John Dewey, 1902

Martin Luther King, Jr., with Malcolm X, 1964

Turning from practical action to morality, the disagreement between Gandhi and his reader is echoed by the disagreement between Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968) and his fellow civil rights activist **Malcolm X** (1925–1965).

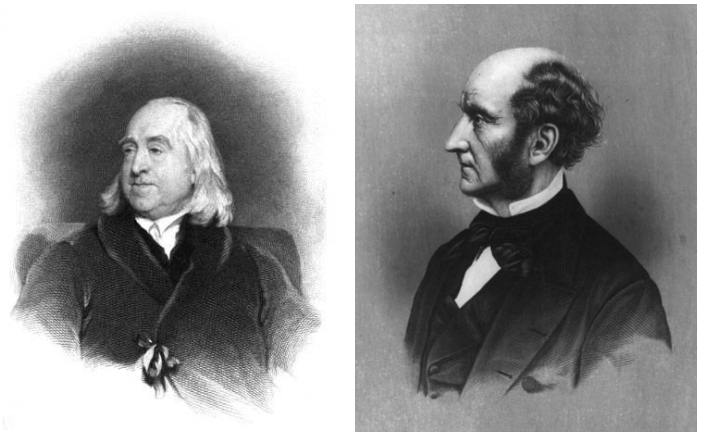
In his speeches, Malcolm firmly advocated fighting against injustice "by any means necessary" (1964).

King argued instead that "Constructive ends can never give absolute moral justification to destructive means, because in the final analysis the end is preexistent in the mean"—a very Deweyan/Gandhian point (1958).

The Malcolm-King dispute is related to a wider dispute between two major ethical theories. According to classical **utilitarians**, such as British philosophers **Jeremy Bentham** (1748–1832) and **John Stuart Mill** (1806–1873), moral action is governed by the **Greatest Happiness Principle**, whose slogan is:

> "The greatest happiness for the greatest number."

This is a **consequentialist** theory because it makes morality dependent entirely on whether the action has a certain consequence (i.e., result, outcome, fruit—or end), namely that the action produces maximal happiness. To use a popular phrase, consequentialism maintains that **"the end justifies the means."**



Jeremy Bentham (Left) and John Stuart Mill (Right)

Immanuel Kant
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By contrast, **deontologists**, such as German philosopher **Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804), argued that there are certain moral duties determined independently of consequences. For example, Kant's **Formula of Humanity** puts forward the requirement to

> "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only." (1785/1998, 429)

To illustrate using the famous **organ harvesting case**, suppose you find yourself in the unfortunate situation in which the only way to save 7 people, each in immediate dire need of a different organ, would require harvesting organs from an unwilling healthy person who happens to be their only match. Assume all other relevant factors are on a par (all eight people are equal in every relevant sense, you know how to get away with it in secret so as to avoid negative consequences for yourself, etc.). What should you do? What if the one person were *you*? Or someone very dear to you, such as a family member, significant other, or close friend?

To go through with the killing would plausibly result in more total happiness: seven lives saved for the cost of one. Yet it would require treating that person as a mere means to someone else's end, which is prohibited by the Formula of Humanity. Notice that few would object were the same results (seven lives saved) procured by better means (e.g., a willing donor who has already died). It is the means, so the argument goes, that makes all the moral difference, not the end result.

What do *you* think of this example? What does it suggest about the correct moral theory? What bearing, if any, would your conclusion have on the Malcolm X vs. King debate? Which moral theory, if either, better fits Gandhi's claims about means and ends?

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Section IX. A Reason for Optimism: The Law of Love

[Source: *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, pp. 383–4]

I have found that life persists in the midst of destruction and, therefore, there must be a higher law than that of destruction. Only under that law would a well-ordered society be intelligible and life worth living. And if that is the **law of life**, we have to work it out in daily life. Wherever there are jars, wherever you are confronted with an opponent, conquer him with love. In a crude manner I have worked it out in my life. That does not mean that all my difficulties are solved. I have found, however, that this **law of love** has answered as the **law of destruction** has never done. In India we have had an ocular demonstration of the operation of this law on the widest scale possible. I do not claim therefore that nonviolence has necessarily penetrated the 300 million, but I do claim that it has penetrated deeper than any other message, and in an incredibly short time. We have not been all uniformly nonviolent; and with the vast majority, nonviolence has been a matter of policy. Even so, I want you to find out if the country has not made phenomenal progress under the protecting power of nonviolence.

It takes a fairly strenuous course of training to attain to a mental state of nonviolence. In daily life it has to be a course of discipline though one may not like it, like, for instance, the life of a soldier. But I agree that, unless there is a hearty cooperation of the mind, the mere outward observance will be simply a mask, harmful both to the man himself and to others. The perfect state is reached only when mind and body and speech are in proper coordination. But it is always a case of intense mental struggle. It is not that I am incapable of anger, for instance, but I succeed on almost all occasions to keep my feelings under control. Whatever may be the result, there is always in me a conscious struggle for following the law of nonviolence deliberately and ceaselessly. Such a struggle leaves one stronger for it. Nonviolence is a weapon of the strong. With the weak it might easily be hypocrisy. Fear and love are contradictory terms. Love is reckless in giving away, oblivious as to what it gets in return. Love wrestles with the world as with the self and ultimately gains mastery over all other feelings. My daily experience, as of those who are working with me, is that every problem lends itself to solution if we are determined to make the law of truth and nonviolence the law of life. For truth and nonviolence are, to me, faces of the same coin.

The law of love will work, just as the law of gravitation will work, whether we accept it or not. Just as a scientist will work wonders out of various applications of the law of nature, even so a man who applies the law of love with scientific precision can work greater wonders. For the force of nonviolence is infinitely more wonderful and subtle than the material forces of nature, like, for instance, electricity. The men who discovered for us the law of love were greater scientists than any of our modem scientists. Only our explorations have not gone far enough and so it is not possible for everyone to see all its workings. Such, at any rate, is the hallucination, if it is one, under which I am laboring. The more I work at this law the more I feel the delight in life, the delight in the scheme of this universe. It gives me a peace and a meaning of the mysteries of nature that I have no power to describe.

Section X. The State of the Technique & Its Future: An Experiment

[Source: *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, pp. 385–7]

I have not mastered the whole technique of non-violence. The **experiment**[10] is still in the making. It is not even in its advanced stage. The nature of the experiment requires one to be satisfied with one step at a time. The distant scene is not for him to see. Therefore, my answers can only be speculative. . . .

But I may state my own individual view of the potency of non-violence. . . . Practically speaking there will be probably no greater loss in men than if forcible resistance was offered; there will be no expenditure in armaments and fortifications. The nonviolent training received by the people will add inconceivably to their moral height. Such men and women will have shown personal bravery of a type far superior to that shown in armed warfare. In each case the bravery consists in dying, not in killing. Lastly, there is no such thing as defeat in nonviolent resistance. That such a thing has not happened before is no answer to my speculation. I have drawn no impossible picture. History is replete with instances of individual nonviolence of the type I have mentioned. There is no warrant for saying or thinking that a group of men and women cannot by sufficient training act nonviolently as a group or nation. Indeed the sum total of the experience of mankind is that men somehow or other live on. From which fact I infer that it is the law of love that rules mankind. Had violence, i.e., hate, ruled us, we should have become extinct long ago. And yet the tragedy of it is that the so-called civilized men and nations conduct themselves as if the basis of society was violence. It gives me ineffable joy to make experiments proving that love is the supreme and only law of life.

Appendix: Post-Gandhian Developments

Any study of the philosophy of Gandhi would be incomplete without examining where it was taken in the hands of successors. We may divide post-Gandhian developments in nonviolence into three (chronological but overlapping) phases: the Kingian Transformation, the Strategic Turn, and the Return to a Comprehensive Approach.[11]

A. The Kingian Transformation

The decade following Gandhi's 1948 assassination, King became the most prominent bearer of the nonviolence torch. But as noted in the preface, King did not simply preserve Gandhi's philosophy in its original form; he transformed it in a number of important respects. In his 1964 "American Dream" speech, King summarizes his philosophy of nonviolence. The excerpt that follows includes the relevant portion of that speech. As you read, try to isolate the Gandhian strands from the uniquely Kingian contributions.

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Box 11 – King's Philosophy of Nonviolence

"Now I would like to take a few minutes to say something about this method or this philosophy of nonviolence, because it has played such a prominent role in our struggle over the last few years, both north and south. First I should say that I am still convinced that the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and human dignity is nonviolent resistance. I am convinced that this is a powerful method. It disarms the opponent, it exposes his moral defenses, it weakens his morale and at the same time it works on his conscience, and he just doesn't know how to deal with it. If he doesn't beat you, wonderful. If he beats you, you develop the courage of accepting blows without retaliating. If he doesn't put you in jail, wonderful; nobody with any sense loves to go to jail. But if he puts you in jail, you go in that jail and transform it from a dungeon of shame to a haven of freedom and human dignity. Even if he tries to kill you, you develop the inner conviction that there are some things so precious, some things so dear, some things so eternally true that they are worth dying for. And in a sense, if an individual has not discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live. This is what the nonviolent discipline says. And there is something about this that disarms the opponent and he doesn't know how to deal with it.

Another thing about this method is that it makes it possible for individuals to struggle to secure moral ends through moral means. One of the great debates of history has been over this whole question of ends and means. There have been those individuals who have argued that the end justifies the means. Sometimes the whole systems of government have gone down this path. I think this is one of the great weaknesses and tragedies of Communism; it is right here, that often the attitude that any method, any means can be used to bring about the goal of the classless society. This is where the nonviolent philosophy would break from Communism or any other system that argues that the end justifies the means, because in a real sense the end is pre-existent in the means. And the means represent the ideal in the making and the end in process. And somehow in the long run of history, immoral means cannot bring about moral ends. And so the nonviolent philosophy makes it possible for individuals to work to secure moral ends through moral means.

Now, there is another thing about this philosophy—I guess it's one of the most misunderstood aspects. It says that it is possible to struggle passionately and unrelentingly against an unjust system and yet not stoop to hatred in the process. The love ethic can stand at the center of a nonviolent movement. And people always ask me, 'What in the world do you mean by this? How can you love people who are bombing your home, and people who are threatening your children, and people who are using violence against your every move?' I guess they have a point. I'm not talking about emotional bosh at this point. It is nonsense to urge oppressed people to love their oppressor in an affectionate sense. This isn't what we are talking about.

Fortunately the Greek language comes to our aid in trying to discover the meaning of love in this context. There are three words in the Greek language for love. One is the word '*eros*.' ***Eros*** is a sort of aesthetic love. . . . Then there is '***philia***.' The Greek language talks about this kind of reciprocal love, a sort of... a love that develops out of the fact that you, you like the person. You love because you are loved. This is friendship. There is another word in the Greek language. It is the word '*agape*.' ***Agape*** is more than friendship, *agape* is more than aesthetic or romantic love. *Agape* is understanding, creative, redemptive good will for all men. It is an overflowing love that seeks nothing in return. Theologians would say that it is the love of God operating in the human heart. And when one rises to love on this level, he loves every man, not because he likes him but because God loves him. And he rises to the level of loving the person who does the evil deed while hating the deed that the person does.

And I think that this is the kind of love that can guide us through the days and weeks and years ahead. This is the kind of love that can help us achieve and create **the beloved community**. I think this is what Jesus meant when he said, 'Love your enemies,' and I'm so happy he didn't say, 'Like your enemies,' it's pretty difficult to like some people. Like is an affection. It has sentimental qualities and, frankly, it is difficult to like, I find it very difficult to like Senator Thurmond and Senator Eastland and the things that they are doing on this Civil Rights issue and the way they are voting, I really don't like it. But Jesus says, 'Love them' and love is greater than like. Love is understanding, creative, redemptive good will for all men. And I seriously say that I think this can stand at the center of the nonviolent movement and help bring about the new America, the great America.

> And so, as Dr. Oxnam said earlier, we can stand before our violent, most violent opponents and say in substance, we will match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we will still love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws because noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. And so throw us in jail and we will still love you. Burn our homes and threaten our children, and as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hours and beat us and drag us out on some wayside road and leave us half dead and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will so appeal to your heart and your conscience that we will win you in the process. And our victory will be a double victory.
>
> This is the nonviolent message."
>
> Source: "The American Dream" (Excerpt)
> Speech delivered at Drew University
> February 5, 1964

Like Gandhi, King was a prolific author and speaker—with an estimated 14 volumes of collected works. But King was also much more consistent and systematic. The King Center, established in 1968 by **Coretta Scott King** (1927–2006) after her husband's assassination, extracted the King Philosophy from King's writings and organized this philosophy into four main components:

- **The Triple Evils** (three main forms of violence)
- **The Six Principles of Nonviolence** (the fundamental philosophical tenets)
- **The Six Steps of Nonviolence** (how to conduct a campaign from start to finish)
- **The Beloved Community** (the ultimate goal)

Coretta Scott King receiving the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding for the year 1966 on behalf of her husband, from Dr. Zakir Hussain, President of India, in 1969.

From the U.S. Embassy New Delhi via Flickr
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It is easy enough to read the very brief and clear descriptions of these components directly from the King Center's site (and I encourage doing so). However, it is worth listing the Six Steps here:

1. **Information Gathering**
2. **Education**
3. **Personal Commitment**
4. **Negotiation**
5. **Direct Action**
6. **Reconciliation**

Each of the six is a step toward **conflict reconciliation**. Regarding the general approach at any of these stages, King described himself as "Hegelian," taking inspiration from the German philosopher **Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel** (1770–1831). According to (a popular but possibly inaccurate understanding of) the so-called **Hegelian dialectic**, the putting forward of any **thesis** (claim) gives rise to an **antithesis** (opposing claim), creating a tension between the two (conflict), the adequate resolution of which is a **synthesis** (claim taking into account both the thesis and its antithesis).

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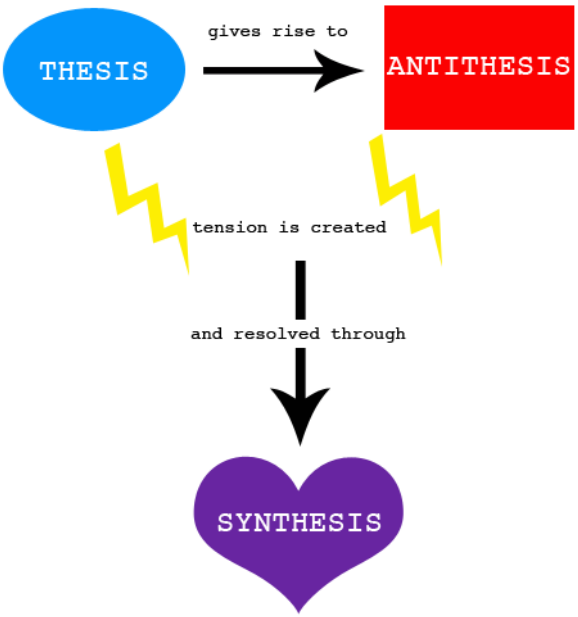
The synthesis then becomes the new thesis, which receives its own antithesis, yielding a further synthesis—and so on. This is the Hegelian explanation of progress.



The Structure of Hegelian Dialectic
Image by Essieruth via Wikimedia Commons
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Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel
1842 Sketch

King's insight was to apply the Hegelian framework to explain nonviolent social change. He treated violence as a thesis, apathy as its antithesis, and nonviolent resistance as a synthesis. Nonviolent resistance *qua* nonviolence sees the wisdom inherent in the antithesis (apathy), namely that we ought to avoid the error made by the thesis (violence). Nonviolent resistance *qua* resistance sees the wisdom inherent in the thesis (violence), namely that we ought to avoid the error of the antithesis (apathy). So, nonviolent resistance incorporates both truths but avoids both errors, accomplishing what neither the thesis nor the antithesis does alone. Applying this overarching theoretical idea to specific real-world conflicts, King sought to analyze all sides of a given conflict with an eye toward distilling some truth in each perspective, then melding those truths together to move the conflict gradually toward reconciliation.

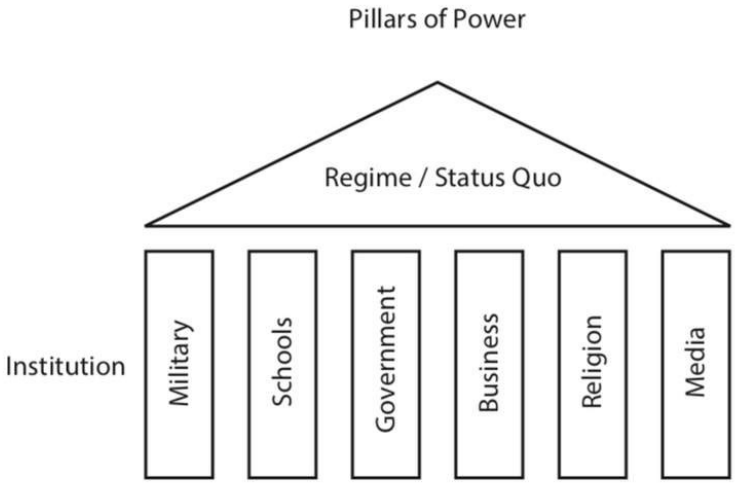
Return now to the Six Steps. During the Nashville desegregation movement, James Lawson was sent by King to lead nonviolence workshops. As part of these workshops, Lawson taught the steps which the movement would later carry out. More generally, he helped participants learn about nonviolence, plan, strategize, role play potential scenarios, and prepare themselves for action. Such careful preparation was key to the movement's success. Advocates of this approach say that a lack of similar method, organization, planning, training, and discipline in many other nonviolence campaigns is a common reason for failure.

Fortunately, the workshops did not stop in Nashville. One of the Nashville leaders, **Bernard Lafayette, Jr.**, recalls King's last words to him just hours before the assassination—"Now, Bernard, the next movement we're going to have is to institutionalize and internationalize nonviolence"—which he took as his "final marching orders" (Haga 2013). In partnership with fellow civil rights activist David Jehnsen, those orders were fulfilled. Trainings in "Kingian Nonviolence Conflict Reconciliation" are now offered in schools and prisons, to activists, educators, social workers, and community organizers, and to other institutions and groups all over the world.

B. The Strategic Turn

Like Gandhi, King's nonviolence was rooted in moral and religious principles, even though both men provided a wealth of astute insights into strategy. But our next major figure, Gene Sharp, preferred to ground his theory in strategy alone, intentionally uprooting nonviolence from its moral and religious origins—origins which he viewed as potential weaknesses (notwithstanding his Quaker upbringing).

In 1973, nonviolent strategy was given a new depth of analysis with the publication of Sharp's three-volume *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. In Part I, Sharp developed his influential theory of power. The idea is that a regime or status quo receives its power from various "**pillars of support**"—the institutions on which it relies for its perceived legitimacy, resources, operations, etc.



From *Beautiful Trouble*
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To defeat an unjust regime or status quo, one first needs to identify the pillars then develop nonviolent strategies to undermine each, ideally by co-opting people from them, bringing them over to the resistance. Once the pillars are sufficiently weak, the regime or status quo will fall. With the pillars intact rather than destroyed, the result is a transfer of power to the resistance (rather than anarchy). Since the transfer is voluntary and cooperative (not achieved by threat or force), and involves agents below the top tiers of power, the seeds of democracy are planted.

In Part II, Sharp identifies three progressively demanding categories of nonviolent methods, each serving its own specific functions:

(i) protest and persuasion (e.g., marches, pamphleteering, negotiations)
(ii) noncooperation (e.g., strikes, boycotts)
(iii) intervention (e.g., sit-ins, nonviolent invasions, parallel governments)

These three categories contain the specific tactics enumerated in Sharp's famous list of "198 Methods of Nonviolent Action" (the basis for Nonviolence International's expanded Nonviolent Tactics Database, which now includes 300+ methods and counting).

Part III concludes the series with an examination of the major principles and factors that govern nonviolent dynamics, such as timing, numbers, leadership, psychology, and his concept of political jiu-jitsu (introduced in Box 6).

For Sharp, political jiu-jitsu is one of the primary reasons why nonviolent means must be maintained with scrupulous discipline: only nonviolence can avoid the backfire effect which characterizes political jiu-jitsu. Even a small amount of violence injected into an otherwise nonviolent protest can have a dramatic negative impact. Consider, for example, an individual participant in a peaceful march who bashes in a window during a moment of losing their cool. This person receives all the media attention, thereby polluting the moral character of the entire group in the eyes of the public, causing the movement to lose potential support and face even greater opposition. This disproportionate pollution effect has ruined enough protests to earn a name of its own: "Nagler's Law," coined "semi-facetiously" by **Michael Nagler**, a pioneer of peace studies at Berkeley and founder of the Metta Center for Nonviolence. Nagler sums up his "Law" in a formula (which, taken literally, is mathematical nonsense, as he recognizes): **NV + V = V**.

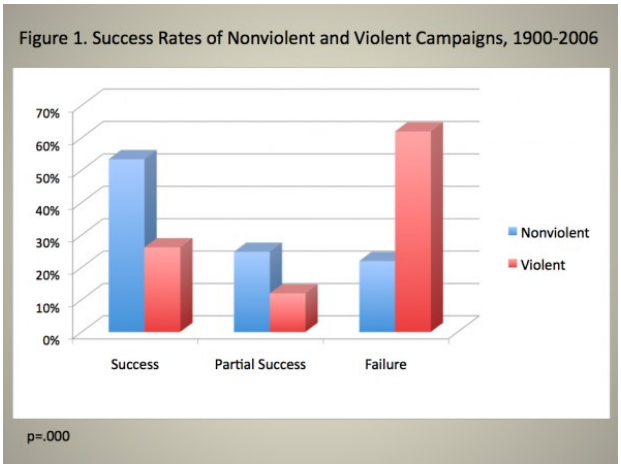
Sharp's work isn't mere armchair speculation. In 1993, he was asked by Burmese resistance to write an accessible generic summary of how an oppressed people could move *From Dictatorship to Democracy* using nonviolence. The manual quickly spread to resistance groups worldwide, who used it to successfully overthrow a wave of oppressive regimes—successful despite desperate attempts to blacklist Sharp's work and discredit it through propaganda campaigns. A case in point is *Otpor!* (meaning "resistance"), the Serbian opposition movement which overthrew Slobodan Milosevic, the "Butcher of the Balkans," in 2000. For such contributions, Sharp was nominated on multiple occasions for the Nobel Peace Prize.

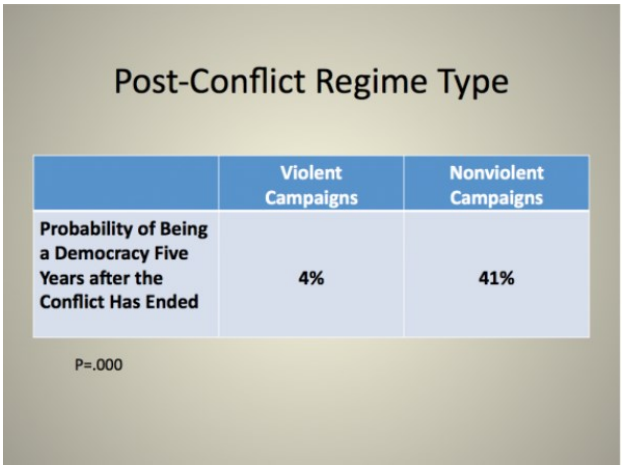
Bringing Down a Dictator, York's 2002 Documentary on *Otpor!*

Political scientist **Erica Chenoweth** was initially skeptical upon encountering such striking claims for nonviolence at a conference on the topic. Are the success stories, such as *Otpor!*, representative or mere selection bias? What would be the result of an empirical study of the comparative success rates of violent and nonviolent resistance against brutal regimes? Such studies had not been done. So, Chenoweth and their fellow researcher and co-author Maria J. Stephan embarked on a multi-year project to create datasets, crunch the numbers, and analyze the results.

Chenoweth, "The Success of Nonviolent Civil Resistance," TEDxBoulder Talk in 2013

Despite focusing on the "hard cases" (i.e., cases where nonviolence would presumably be least effective), Chenoweth and Stephan concluded that nonviolence consistently has a greater success rate, lower probability of post-conflict civil war, and higher probability of long-term post-conflict democracy.





Source: https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2012/02/erica-chenoweth-confronting-the-myth-of-the-rational-insurgent-2.html

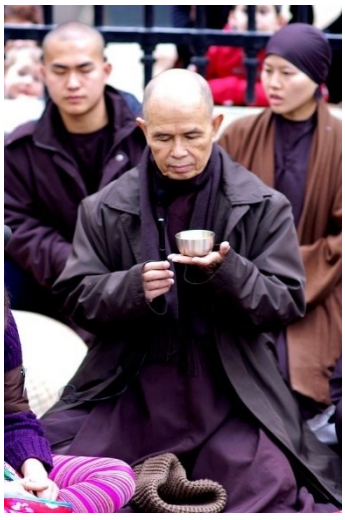
For more data, the methodology used, and explanations of the results, see their 2012 book *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. A brief overview is provided in Chenoweth's TEDxBoulder talk (above). Several full-length lectures, which provide much more depth, are easily found on YouTube.

C. The Return to a Comprehensive Approach

Despite the burgeoning of strategic nonviolence and empirical work, Michael Nagler argues that it's far from enough. **Strategic nonviolence** is a problem-solving approach based on cost-benefit analysis. It treats nonviolence as a tool reserved for occasions on which problems arise, and only for as long as it continues to be an effective tool for the job in question. This fails to address the ever-present underlying causes of violence. At best, nonviolence construed as a mere tactic temporarily pushes violence back beneath the surface, where it lies dormant but ready to erupt once re-activated by circumstance. A nonviolent future requires a more systematic, **principled nonviolence**, a form which uproots the seeds of violence before they can sprout.

"Roadmap to a Nonviolent Future"
From the Metta Center for Nonviolence.

On Nagler's analysis, the modern cultural paradigm posits a purely material universe devoid of purpose in which selfishness, separateness, and the scarcity of resources inevitably reign—a package which fuels fear, unhealthy forms of competition, hatred, and ultimately violence. Hence, we need nothing less than a cultural **paradigm shift**[12] to a "**new story**" of how to conceive of ourselves as human beings and our relationships to each other, to (non-human) animals, to the environment, and to the cosmos as a whole—a story which brings nonviolence into everyday mainstream consciousness.



Thich Nhat Hanh in 2006
Photo by Duc Truong via Flickr
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The approach must be comprehensive: individual and social; local and global; scientific and spiritual; applied to every domain, including the environment, mental health, social justice, the economy, government, and education. In short, nonviolence must become a "way of life." In his latest book *The Third Harmony: Nonviolence and the New Story of Human Nature*, Nagler lays out a comprehensive "Roadmap" to bring about the paradigm shift in accordance with the new story. At the center of this Roadmap is self-transformation to be deliberately cultivated through a variety of principles and practices drawn from science and the world's contemplative traditions. To end with the words of the Vietnamese monk, teacher, author, and peace activist **Thich Nhat Hanh** from the opening chapter of his *Being Peace*—a pioneering text of "**socially engaged Buddhism**"—it is only by "being peace that we can make peace" (2005, 18).

Box 12 – The Three Harmonies

"In ancient India the sages spoke of 'three sources of suffering,' from the environment, from other beings, and especially from within ourselves. To be secure, happy, and free from suffering, we must establish three harmonies:

–with the environment and the universe (the first harmony),

–with others (the second harmony),

and most importantly,

–within ourselves—**the third harmony.**"

Source: https://mettacenter.org/thirdharmony/
Retrieved July 3, 2021

The Metta Center's 2020 Documentary *The Third Harmony* (Trailer)

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Questions for Reflection & Discussion

PREFACE

1. What role(s) did Gandhi play in the development of nonviolence?
2. What significance did Gandhi have for Martin Luther King, Jr.?
3. Summarize the key points from the India segment of York's 1999 film *A Force More Powerful*.
    - Sub-questions to guide your summary: What was Gandhi trying to achieve in India (both in the short- and long-term)? Who were his opponents and what were they doing? What obstacles did Gandhi face? What actions did he take to overcome those obstacles? In particular, why did he fast and what was the Salt March? What valuable strategic points did you learned along the way?
4. Is nonviolence simply the absence of violence? If not, what is it?
5. Some critics charge that nonviolence is passive, a failure to act, or a cowardly attempt to avoid standing up to an enemy. How would nonviolentists respond to these charges?

SECTION I

6. What do you think are the various differences among nonresistance, passive resistance, civil disobedience/resistance, and direct action? Are these differences important? What are their comparative advantages and disadvantages?
7. What does the term "*Satyagraha*" mean? Why was it coined? What are the defining features of *Satyagraha*?
8. What do Gandhi and Thoreau claim about breaking unjust laws? Do you agree? (Suggestion: Read Plato's *Crito*, then compare and contrast what's said there by Socrates with Gandhi's and Thoreau's claims.)

SECTION II

9. What is Gandhi's conception of *Satya* (Truth)? What is the difference between "Truth" and "truth"?
10. Explain and evaluate the role that Truth plays in Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence. Incorporate the material from Box 3. (Tip: Also revisit what Gandhi says about Truth in Section I.)

SECTIONS III–IV

11. What is *ahimsa*? For Gandhi, how is it related to Truth?
12. What is Gandhi's point about the Prodigal Son? (Suggestion: Read the Biblical passage where the parable is introduced: Luke 15:11–32.)

13. How does Gandhi think we ought to perceive, and feel about, an opponent? (Suggestion: Incorporate the material from Boxes 4 and 5.)
14. Is Gandhi right that "Three-fourths of the miseries and misunderstandings in the world will disappear, if we step into the shoes of our adversaries and understand their standpoint"?
15. If Gandhi is right that we should not judge people, does it make sense to take action against injustice? (Suggestion: Incorporate the material from Box 5.)

SECTION V

16. Explain and evaluate the role of self-suffering in Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence. Specifically, what does self-suffering help us avoid and what positive good does it purportedly serve? (Suggestion: Incorporate the material from Box 6.)

SECTION VI

17. What are Gandhi's critiques of those who support the "doctrine of the sword"? Why is this doctrine the "law of the brute"?
18. What is the "law of our species"? What is the source of true strength and why? (Suggestion: Incorporate the material from Box 7.)

SECTION VII

19. What kind of "army" does Gandhi propose? What are its features/functions? What will it replace?
20. Do you think this kind of army is a good idea? (Suggestion: Peruse the Nonviolent Peaceforce website, then read Stephanie Van Hook's *Metta Blog* post, "What Would It Take to Start a Peace Army?")

SECTION VIII

21. *Explain* Gandhi's main claims about means and ends, including his examples. If he's right, what bearing does it have on (non)violence? (Suggestion: Incorporate the material from Boxes 8 and 9.)
22. *Evaluate* Gandhi's claims about means and ends. (Suggestion: Incorporate the material from Box 10.)
23. What is the name for the view that the "end justifies the means"? Suppose this view is correct. Might there still be a reasonable case to be made for nonviolentism? If so, how would that go?

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SECTION IX

24. What does Gandhi mean by the "law of love"? As opposed to what?

25. Why does Gandhi believe that the "law of love will work as the law of gravitation will work"? Does he present an argument or evidence for this claim? If so, explain and evaluate it.

26. In what sense does Gandhi mean that "love is reckless"? Does he intend this as a criticism of love? How does his point here relate to the justification of *ahimsa* and the acceptance of self-suffering?

SECTION X

27. What does Gandhi mean to suggest by calling his technique an "experiment"? How does this connect to his language of "laws"? (Suggestion: Refer to Note 5.)

PUTTING THE ABOVE TOGETHER: PREFACE + SECTIONS I–X

28. After watching either the India or Nashville segment of York's 1999 film *A Force More Powerful*, describe in detail one example of nonviolence from the documentary and explain its success or failure using Gandhi's philosophy and terminology. Would violence have stood an equal or greater chance of success? Why or why not?

APPENDIX

29. Read King's summary of his philosophy of nonviolence from Box 11. Which points are Gandhian? What are King's original contributions?

30. Suppose that a nonviolence campaign has satisfactorily completed the fifth of the Kingian Six Steps. In other words, the campaign has succeeded. Why bother with the sixth step? (Tip: Consider both moral and strategic perspectives, including potential implications for the immediate and distant future.)

31. Choose any example of a conflict, then analyze it using King's "Hegelian" framework.

32. Some critics of nonviolent resistance oppose the goal. Others oppose its methods because they think that violence is "necessary" in certain cases. Still others oppose the methods of nonviolent resistance for the sake of "law and order." This last set of reasons is a recurrent critique. It is repeatedly lodged against many of today's resistance movements, and it can be traced back to the "Statement by Alabama Clergymen" issued against King and his associates while King was under arrest in Birmingham, Alabama. King's response to the clergymen, composed on the spot, was later published as his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail." First read the clergymen's "Statement" and extract the criticisms. Then read the "Letter" and identify King's responses to each criticism.

33. After Gandhi, King, and other oft-cited examples of nonviolence, many critics argue that to the extent there was success in these cases, it was only because the opposition (the British Empire in Gandhi's case, the American status quo in King's case) was unwilling to resort to brutal force. Nonviolence, they say, could never work against a brutal dictator, for example. Evaluate this argument using what you learned about the work of Sharp, Chenoweth, and Stephan.

34. Even if nonviolence will work against many brutal dictators, a common objection is that it won't work against the most extreme cases, such as Hitler and ISIS. Read/view at least two of the following short discussions on the prospects for nonviolence in this context:

    - Maciej Bartkowski, "Nonviolent Strategies to Defeat Totalitarians Such as ISIS" https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/nonviolent-strategies-to-defeat-totalitarians-such-as-isis/
    - Michael Huemer, "The Irrationality of Politics" (TEDxMileHighSalon), https://youtu.be/4JYL5VUe5NQ
    - Jorgen Johansen, "Hitler and the Challenge of Non-Violence" https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/hitler-and-challenge-of-non-violence/
    - Ian Sinclair, "Resisting the Nazis in Numerous Ways: Nonviolence in Occupied Europe" https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/non-violence-against-nazis-interview-with-george-paxton/

    Then summarize and evaluate the main arguments.

35. Would Sharp's theory work just as well for those on the side of injustice? Why or why not?

36. What are Michael Nagler's concerns about a purely strategic approach to nonviolence? What does he propose instead? Do you agree?

37. Explain and evaluate Thich Nhat Hanh's claim that it is by "being peace that we can make peace."

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: PREFACE + SECTIONS I–X + APPENDIX

38. Nonviolence Speech Exercise

    Consider an ongoing conflict in society today. Imagine that you have just been appointed to lead a nonviolent campaign to address the conflict. Drawing on everything you have learned in this book (the Preface, documentary clips, Sections I–X, the Appendix, and the Boxes), compose the first speech you will give to those seeking your guidance, explaining and defending your general approach. Your goal is to motivate and convince the masses. Begin by introducing the conflict, the side you are on, your ultimate goal, and your expectations for what lies ahead. Then explain the basic steps your campaign will need to take, along with the basic elements of your strategic plan. Finally, address those in the audience who are passionately urging you to use violence.

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- Chenoweth's slides: https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2012/02/erica-chenoweth-confronting-the-myth-of-the-rational-insurgent-2.html

Nonviolence Resources

The Acorn: Philosophical Studies in Nonviolence and Pacifism: https://acornjournal.net/

Albert Einstein Institution: https://www.aeinstein.org/

Anti-Defamation League's "Pyramid of Hate": https://www.adl.org/media/12060/download

Concerned Philosophers for Peace: https://peacephilosophy.org/

International Center on Nonviolence Conflict: https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/

The King Center: https://thekingcenter.org/

Metta Center for Nonviolence: https://mettacenter.org/

M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence: https://gandhiinstitute.org/

Nonviolence International's "Nonviolent Tactics Database": https://www.tactics.nonviolenceinternational.net/

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Notes

[1] Those working in the Kingian tradition adopted the convention of using the hyphenated "non-violence" to refer to the negative, passive concept (the absence of violence), distinguishing it from the unhyphenated "nonviolence," which refers to the positive, active concept they advocate. However, this is a post-Gandhian development. Hence, the presence or absence of a hyphen has no significance in translations of Gandhi. For passages included in this work, I have preserved hyphenation or lack thereof in the original sources.

[2] Confusingly, Gandhi elsewhere says "…. it was decided to award a prize to anyone who could think of an appropriate term. A Gujarati-speaking gentleman submitted the word '*satyagraha*,' and it was adjudged the best" (1986, 44). So, did Gandhi coin the word or not? Yes and no. The full story is recounted in his autobiography: "…. I could not for the life of me find out a new name, and therefore offered a nominal prize through *Indian Opinion* to the reader who made the best suggestion on the subject. As a result Maganlal Gandhi [M.K. Gandhi's follower and younger first cousin once removed] coined the word *Sadagraha* (*Sat*: truth, *Agraha*: firmness) and won the prize. But in order to make it clearer I changed the word to *Satyagraha* which has since become current in Gujarati as a designation for the struggle" (1968).

[3] Gandhi's conception of Truth stems primarily from the *Advaita* tradition (within the *Vedanta* school of orthodox Hindu philosophy), although to some extent it is novel. For an exploration of this, see Richards (1986).

[4] Possibly a reference to John Bunyan's 1678 Christian allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come*, which Gandhi had read in South Africa and explicitly mentioned in multiple speeches and writings.

[5] Gandhi refers to many of his main principles as "laws." There are several possible sources of this tendency. First, Hindu thought refers to some of its principles as "laws," such as the "law of *karma*." Second, one of Gandhi's major influences, Leo Tolstoy, used the same locution, "law of love." Third, Gandhi studied law in England and practiced law for some time afterward as an attorney in South Africa and India. Finally, during his legal studies, he studied science and mathematics with a knack for geometry, compared his "laws" to Euclid's propositions and to the "law of gravitation," and frequently described his various personal practices and commitments (vegetarianism and diet generally, replacing European clothing with traditional homespun, walking wherever possible, vow of chastity, commitment to nonviolence, etc.) as "experiments"—a term aptly chosen as the title of his autobiography: *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

[6] The capitalized "Truth" (which occurs in noun form only) refers to the absolute/universal/objective notion, whereas the lowercase "truth" refers to that which is partial/limited/incomplete/relative/perspective-dependent.

[7] *Ahimsa* is a tenet of the Jain and Hindu religions, which takes its strongest form in the former. The Jain philosophy, developed by Mahavira in the 6th century BCE, maintains (a) that all things in existence have souls (with differing degrees of consciousness) and (b) *ahimsa* applies to all things that have souls. Jains recognize that this yields a nearly impossible ethic, toward which we must nevertheless strive. Although Gandhi adhered to Hinduism, Jainism was especially influential among Hindus in the region where he grew up, including his mother. This partly explains Gandhi's attraction to ascetism, including his strict vegetarianism and other "experiments" in minimalist living.

[8] Or "untouchables," referring to members of society who are regarded as belonging to the bottom of, or outside of, the hereditary caste system.

[9] A reference to Galatians 6:7.

[10] As mentioned in Note 5, Gandhi frequently used the term "experiment" to describe his various personal practices and commitments. He may be influenced here by Thoreau's *Walden*, which Gandhi read in 1906. There Thoreau describes his time at Walden Pond as an "experiment of living."

[11] For an alternative division of modern nonviolence into three "waves," see Nagler (2013). The "first wave" includes both Gandhi and King (hence, unlike my division, Nagler's is not exclusively post-Gandhian). The "second wave" includes nonviolent insurrectionary movements to oppression around the world, corresponding roughly to the same phase as my (differently defined) "Strategic Turn." The "third wave" is global, specifically the global anti-war movement and opposition to corporate globalization.

[12] Nagler (1983) draws on Thomas Kuhn's famous theory of scientific revolutions (Kuhn 1996). Kuhn's basic idea is that science progresses normally (making small advances) within the current dominant "paradigm"—until irresolvable tensions in the paradigm accumulate, producing a "crisis." During the crisis, someone not deeply embedded within the paradigm (e.g., a young, up-and-coming scientist) has an insight outside of that paradigm capable of resolving its tensions, thereby instigating a "paradigm shift" which marks the end of the crisis and beginning of a "revolution."